Nuggets Of News

April 2004

News, Photographs and Events of the Gold Hill Historical Society, Est. 1986
Meetings are held 6:30 pm the third Wednesday of each month at the Museum, 504 First Avenue, Gold Hill, Oregon
(except August when the annual potluck is held at noon on the third Sunday)
Mailing address: PO Box 26, Gold Hill, Oregon 97525-0026 Telephone: (541) 855-1182 Fax: (541)776-4263
Museum Hours: Thursday, Friday & Saturday, 12 noon to 4 p.m., except holidays
Admission free

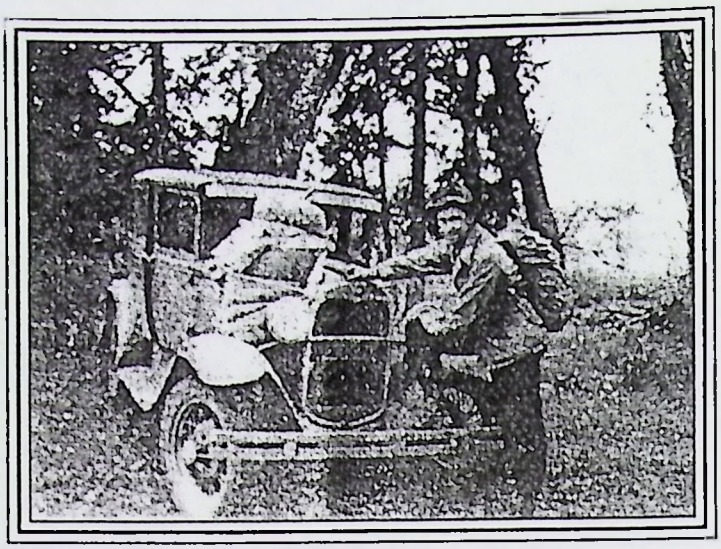
The Memorial Garden has added an extraordinary splash of color to the GHHS museum grounds. Literally hundreds of flower bulbs planted in the cold wet soil during months past by hardworking members Marge Martin, Clare Moore, and Sherry Young have rewarded all with thick bands of yellows, oranges, reds, and whites for all to enjoy. Now that those muddy feet, dirty fingernails, and aching backs are just memories, we are reminded that we really do reap what we sow. And this is just the beginning of the floral tribute! Colors will continue emerging throughout the seasons, reminding us of the purpose of the Memorial Garden. Our gold miner fountain installation is nearing completion, and the thin twig of a weeping cherry tree has bravely leafed out towards the heavens. Flowering shrubs will soon join with the warm rich soil to add towards the floral kaleidoscope. A BIG hug of appreciation goes to the numerous donors of monetary, cerebral, or sweat equity, who all together brought this soothing

blessing to a reality.

MUSEUM VISITORS

So many visiting out-of-town members using our research facilities makes us more aware that we are fulfilling our main goal – that of preserving the local history. Ernest Nelson from Thayer, Wyoming, a Gall family descendant was quite excited with the "finds" he made in our archives of documents and photographs. As was Deana, of Chico, California, a descendant of several prominent local families, including "the" White family (think stage stop, Rock Point Cemetery, etc.). Students, too, especially high school and college, utilize and benefit from the museum's free research facilities.

What a joy knowing that the volunteer hours invested, over the past 17 years and the present, are appreciated and giving back a long-term return.



By Ted Wharton

We'll be Home if the Creek Don't Rise

I would like to start this true tale of adventure by introducing the two main characters involved. My name is Ted Wharton, parts manager at Sam Jennings Co. in Medford for 40 some years, and my fishing and hunting partner Elliott C. Lester ("Doc") who was manager of the tire department for about the same number of years. In the 1940s, and for the following years, we became acquainted with most of the Lake Creek and Little Butte Creek residents. At least weekly a resident of that "neck of the woods" would be at Jennings having a tire fixed, an oil change, or a fender welded.

Some time around 1940, Buck Walsh told us about a little, lost lake in a deep canyon, where the fishing was fabulous. Doc had also heard this information from Trevell Turpin who had been there but with his wooden leg could no longer make the hike in. It was at least a five-mile uphill hike. With our interest thus aroused we decided to look for the lake to see if it lived up to its name. The die was cast when John Walch, who lived at the mouth of Lost Creek, was at the shop having a wagon tire fixed. Doc quizzed him about the subject, and in turn, John allowed we could go in thru his land and park at the old Grissom place up Lost Creek.

Gear was assembled and loaded in the old "30" Model "A" Ford, for what would turn out to be an abortive trip. We eagerly started on a Friday afternoon in April 1941. A lot of snow was still in the high country that year, but we didn't expect to find any at the 3500-foot lake. Going in above John's place, we had to ford the creek below the Grissom place. With the high wheels on the Model "A" we had no trouble crossing. Then came a dilapidated wood and log bridge, which appeared unsafe to cross. We parked near an old shed and prepared for our hike.

Darkness caught us within a mile, then a light rain began to fall. We prepared to hole up for the night by throwing up a tarp shelter. We ate some cold salami and buns, but didn't attempt to start a fire. Sitting under the tarp, snug and dry, we enjoyed the typical Oregon spring weather as we listened to a lone owl hooting in the distance. After rehashing some of our past outings, we hit the sleeping bags early. Morning dawned clear and cold, with a promise of a good day ahead. Doc had a fire going in a hurry with his pitchwood starter, and coffee was soon ready. After a quick breakfast of instant oatmeal, coffee, and scorched toast with some of Doc's pear jam, we packed our gear and hit the trail. The well-marked trail was in bad repair, with places washed out, and got steeper as we followed it. Figuring it would only be a five-mile hike, we wisely left the tarp pitched in case of more stormy weather (plus saving the extra weight of packing 30 lbs of wet tarp). As we worked our way up the trail, it got steeper, but the trees began to thin out to where we could see the rim rocks on the west side of Deer Mountain.

Buck had sketched us a crude map which showed an old campsite about half a mile below the lake. He called it "Horse Camp", as I recall. Arriving at a fork in the trail, we took the left and soon discovered an old campsite of sorts. There was a dilapidated table, fire ring, old wash tub, and some rusty buckets. Straw was scattered around, with evidence that horses had been tethered nearby. We later learned the camp was where early day land owners had mixed cement, then dragged it by mule drawn sleds to the lake outlet. There they used it to build a head gate to divert irrigation water, apparently into a canal or ditch originally. From the camp we followed what appeared to be an old road grade which took us within sight of the lake. Some brush obscured the old dam, which we finally located in the crevasse at the outlet of the lake.

With a few inches of old snow still on the ground, and the lake full, muddy, and overflowing, we decided to spend the night there at a small campsite under a large maple tree. One big limb had broken off, making a table of sorts. Ardent fisherman Doc quickly rigged up his pole, baited with a worm, and on the first cast landed a nice 11" trout. I determined it was a Rainbow, but Doc lowed as how it was a "Silver", a native to the creek and lake.

The slushy snow soon melted under the bright sunlight, bringing muddy ground. The rest of the day was spent at the campsite, deciding to explore the lake on a later trip during better weather. Fishing was fair all day in spite of the muddy water which appeared to take on a special tint in the sunlight. I caught several fish, but Doc knew all the right tricks and filled us out with enough to eat, plus some to take home. All were in the 10" to 12" range. Water dogs (salamander type water lizard) and turtles kept stealing our bait, with one big dog being especially persistent. Doc had just made a fresh pot of coffee in our gallon can, when I got an interesting nibble. I jerked my pole to set the hook on what I hoped was a nice trout. Instead, it was the dog, just under the surface. When I set the hook, Mr. Dog became airborne, flew over my head, and plopped dead center into the boiling coffee. Since water dog wasn't on the menu, we flipped him into the fire. Doc's comments were not fit for print.

After a filling dinner of broiled trout and 'taters baked in the coals, we hit the sack early, under a clear sky and full moon. The melting snow was running down the steep sides of the lake basin, with every gully bringing water into the lake, which was rising noticeably. We decided it would be wise to break camp early the next day and forego any more fishing. It proved a wise decision, as dawn brought more ominous clouds and no sunshine. We packed up and started down the mountain, after taking one quick last look at the old concrete dam, marveling at the effort it must have taken to build it.

By noon we were back to our first campsite gathering up the tarp, ropes, etc. Re-crossing the rickety bridge brought us back to the side of the old Model "A", glad the hike was over. The old Ford cranked over and I nosed it down toward the creek. Confident that we could cross it like we had two days prior, we plunged into the cold murky water and started across. Our good fortune ended at this point. Muddy water from the freshly melted snow was now about three feet deep instead of the one foot we had crossed in just two days before. I also missed my estimate of where the gravel bar was, and the water quickly rose above the floorboards. Then the right rear wheel dropped into a hidden hole. The fan began picking up water, which flooded the engine and sparkplugs. In desperation I cut the fanbelt with my pocketknife, allowing the engine to start. But the damage was already done. We were hopelessly stuck in a rapidly rising flooded Lost Creek. What to do now?

Since Doc knew old John Walch better that I did, he slogged down to John's house just in time to catch him leaving to feed his cattle. After considerable talk, and a lot of horselaughs on John's part, he agreed to pull us out with his tractor. After starting the tractor with a booster battery, John had no problem pulling the old Ford out of the creek bed. But not before the water had risen over the seats and watersoaked our packs and gear. I had tied a rope to the spare tire to keep the rig upright in the swift, ever deepening water.

After thanking John a few dozen times and promising him some free tire repairs, we left. Feeling our problems were over, we started down Little Butte Creek Road. The first sign of trouble was the steam coming from under the hood. Rats!!! I had forgotten about the cut fan belt. Fortunately the drive was mostly downhill and we managed to limp into the Lake Creek Store parking area. Burrill Wyant was standing on the porch, and upon apprising him of our plight, he jumped into action. Frank Fernlund had left his old Model "A" truck parked behind the store. (I believe Burrill's folks ran the store at that time.) With the aid of a monkey wrench, Burrill soon had us a loaner fan belt, which I quickly installed.

The remainder of our trip was uneventful, and the two wet hikers were sure glad to get home to dry out.

As a brief follow-up to this adventure, we took lots of ribbing from the creek residents whenever they came into the Jennings' shop, after that.

We all mourned the loss of E.C. (Doc) Lester who passed away at his home on

October 14, 1986, following a heart attack while deer hunting with me at Dead Indian plateau.

ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF GOLD HILL, OREGON

The first settlement in the immediate area was a log cabin built by Col. T'Vault at Dardenelles, located across the Rogue River from the present town of Gold Hill.

In 1857 gold was discovered on Gall's, Sardine, and Kane Creeks. Kane Creek, originally T'Vault Creek, was later renamed in honor of local settler Dr. Kane. Gall's Creek honors pioneer Jacob Gall, and Sardine Creek's name most likely came about due to the many miners who tightly packed in along it's banks, seeking their riches. Also in 1857, "Immigrant" Graham found the fabulous Gold Hill Lode and soon after took George Ish, James Hayes, John Long, and Thomas Chavner in as partners. The town received its name from this rich vein of ore. Costing $12,000, the first quartz mill was brought in and installed at the Braden Mine near Dardenelles. The Swinden Ledge lode was discovered in 1859. By 1860, total gold production in the area was approximately $400,000.

J.B. White built the area's first post office in 1857, just down river at Rock Point. L.J. White built a hotel there in 1864. The aging hotel eventually was converted into longtime headquarters for Del Rio Orchards and then most recently renovated to become the present day Del Rio Vineyards and Tasting Room.

As the local gold rush subsided, the community gradually built up at its present site. In 1884, Thomas and Rose Chavner deeded land for the city's growth, with blocks laid out 200' x 320', and lots at 50' x 100'. The arrival of the railroad, with a Gold Hill depot, stimulated further growth. Completion of the rail section between Roseburg and San Francisco took place in 1887. The City of Gold Hill was officially incorporated early in 1895, and by 1911 boasted of a population of 182 adults.

Major events helping to shape the history of Gold Hill include: the first school, with classes held in the Methodist Church beginning in 1895; also that same year the Rogue River Telephone Company gained permission to erect telephone poles and wires in the town; the Gold Hill News was established in 1897, moving to a Gold Hill location from Rogue River in the early 1900's; and the Gold Hill Hook & Ladder Company volunteers began providing fire protection late in 1898.

Construction started on the Gold Ray Dam and Powerhouse by the Ray brothers in 1903, and by the end of 1904 local production of electricity was achieved. Unique in design, the power plant is one of only two in the United States using rope drive from turbine to generator. Too costly to maintain in more recent years, Pacific Power & Light deeded the dam, powerhouse, and surrounding 27 acres to Jackson County, stipulating it be used as a public park. The Gold Hill Sports Park, situated on a portion of the original acreage, was subsequently deeded to the town of Gold Hill.

Providing employment for many Gold Hill residents, the Ideal Cement Plant Company (a subsidiary of Portland Cement) started local production in 1914. After more than 50 years of production, automation took its toll and the Gold Hill plant was closed down permanently in 1967.

Gold Hill's population levels continue to hover just above 1000. This charming uncrowded town is fortunate in having picturesque natural boundaries of the world famous Rogue River on the south and east, and rugged mountains on the north. The town's western boundary aligns with Patrick Elementary School, and the Gold Crest Housing tract, which is located on a portion of the former Ideal Cement Plant site.

MUSEUM PROJECTS

Marie Hulse and Clare Moore have been reorganizing the office and files. Marie & Lonnie Hulse, Kelly & Sherry Young, and Marieda spent a busy morning moving furniture in the museum (spring-cleaning!). Talent's Ralph Hunkins donated a box full of old ties for a planned Christmas bazaar craft project. Super seamstress Armella Wharton donated cobbler's aprons for museum workers, plus aprons for individuals in exchange for a donation to the museum. Aprons will also be available for the Christmas bazaar. Ted Wharton has kept busy revising, auditing, and updating the photography system, spending numerous hours alone (with Willie?) in the darkroom. Lyn Parker has been helping Rex with his numerous projects, spraying the yard weeds, plus hostessing the museum. Rex Parker has been frustrated with door alarm repairs, so decided to rewire the entire system. In his spare time he finished the lattice trim under the back porch, built and installed a sturdy research desk in the gift shop area, AND a table to hold the microfiche reader. Marge Martin has been doing the general housekeeping, yard tidiness, and manning the museum reception desk. Clare and Ted have been working on the brass plaques and memorial monument for the garden area. The above is just the tip of the iceberg. Volunteers keep the world turning!

RAILROAD GAP

Railroad Gap creek near upper Evans Creek takes its name from a pass surveyed by the Oregon and California Railroad in the 1870's, as a possible route from Cow Creek into the Rogue Basin. It was never used.

CEMETERY NEWS

The Hayes Pioneer Cemetery survey has been completed. An Oregon Commission on Historic Cemeteries grants request has been submitted in hopes of funding installation of a livestock fence for the access road. This is necessary to protect neighboring livestock and the fragile pioneer cemetery itself.

The Rock Point Historic Cemetery annual spring cleanup day is scheduled for May 15th, 8 AM to 4 PM. Volunteers are invited to come help mow, weed, and trim in anticipation of Memorial weekend visitors. A mid-day potluck is scheduled. This is always a fun and fulfilling day for the volunteers. Supplies needed include garden tools, work gloves, long sleeves, a folding chair, potluck dish, and eating utensils. An Oregon Commission on Historic Cemeteries grants application has been submitted for funding to remove the dead trees and limbs throughout the cemetery.

The Cemetery Committee has decorated painted coffee and tomato juice cans, as free vases for flowers left at gravesites. (Glass vases and jars break and become a hazard to the grounds crew and visitors.)

The former downtown Gold Hill City Park flagpole has been donated to the cemetery, along with numerous flowers and other plants from the park. (The downtown park area is being cleared in preparation for construction of the new library building.)

Live the life you have imagined.
—Henry David Thoreau

2004

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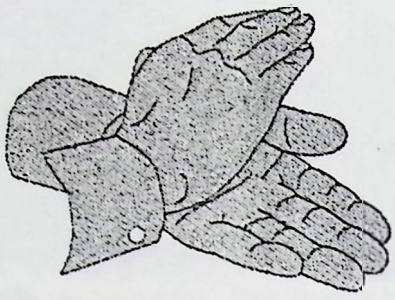
HONORS

Ms Mary Bradish and Ms Alyce Bottleson have been awarded lifetime memberships to the Gold Hill Historical Society. Both charter members have contributed innumerable volunteer hours towards preserving local history. Alyce chaired the initial public meeting, and Mary was the originator of our chosen logo, "Recording the past, for the future". Congratulations, ladies.



SUNSHINE & SYMPATHY

Charter member Alyce Bottleson has been through two major surgeries since the last newsletter, and looks to be in great spirits and vigorous health again.

GHHS President Clare Moore is preparing for back surgery, and looking forward to feeling better in time for a family reunion in the next few months.

Marie Hulse, Sunshine Chairman, is always ready to extend our best wishes, regards, or sympathy, what-ever the circumstance, but asks that we call the museum and notify her when someone is in need of a remembrance.

Gold Hill Historical Society
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